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Shields on Crown Vics in question after death

By **Bob Golfen**

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The fuel tank shields that Ford Motor Co. is installing on hundreds of thousands of police cars nationwide may prove inadequate for preventing the fires that have killed at least 13 police officers, including three in Arizona.

That is the conclusion of Dallas City Attorney Madeleine Johnson after an investigation of the fiery death last month of a Dallas police officer, in which a rear-end crash punctured the fuel tank of his Crown Victoria Police Interceptor.

The tank was punctured four times in the crash, the investigators found, and one of the holes would not have been prevented by the new shields.

The shields are the result of Ford testing and the work of a panel appointed by Ford and Arizona Attorney General and Gov.-elect Janet Napolitano.

In a letter to Ford, Johnson demands that the automaker provide test information for study and company experts for depositions about the shields. Johnson's investigators found that the shields were approved despite failing to prevent leakage in two tests.

A Ford spokesman was unavailable Friday.

There have been at least six similar fires, which resulted in three police deaths, in Crown Victoria patrol cars since May.

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